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ABSTRACT

The guide explains the roles of standards-based assessment in various contexts involving students who are learning English as a second language (ESL). It is designed to accompany the "ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students," a document that sets out the language competencies needed by ESL students to become fully proficient in English, have unrestricted access to grade- appropriate instruction in challenging academic subjects, and ultimately lead rich and productive lives. The first section provides a conceptual model for assessment, including a description of the phases of the assessment process and basic principles for consideration when assessing ESL students. The second section shows the purposes of assessment and the stakeholders' involvement in the process. Section three describes and distinguishes among different approaches to assessment (criterion-referenced, norm-referenced, language proficiency, academic achievement, direct performance, indirect performance), and the last section discusses some general uses for assessment data. Contains 9 references. (MSE)

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Managing the Assessment Process

A Framework for Measuring Student Attainment of the ESL Standards

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Preface

Now that the ESL standards for pre-K–12 students (TESOL, 1997) have been articulated, teachers and other education professionals have asked what is involved in measuring students' progress toward attaining these standards. In response to this request, TESOL has sponsored a related initiative as part of the ESL Standards and Assessment Project. *Managing the Assessment Process* is the first of the assessment documents planned to complement the pre-K–12 ESL standards.

In the introduction to *ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students*, TESOL sets out the language competencies needed by ESOL students "to become fully proficient in English, to have unrestricted access to grade-appropriate instruction in challenging academic subjects, and ultimately to lead rich and productive lives" (pp. 1–2). The purpose of *Managing the Assessment Process* is to explain the roles of standards-based assessment in various contexts involving these students who are learning English as an additional language. A subsequent assessment document will illustrate how to utilize the assessment framework in measuring students' attainment of the ESL standards through classroom-based assessment scenarios.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the reviewers who carefully and thoughtfully read through and commented on the earlier version of this document: Diane August, David Barker, Fred Davidson, David Dolson, Sandra Fradd, Gary Hargett, Dorry Kenyon, Pam McCollum, Penny McKay, J. Michael O'Malley, Janet Orr, Nancy Rhodes, and

Lorraine Valdez Pierce, as well as members of the ESL standards team. We also have benefitted from comments received from TESOL members at the 1997 TESOL Convention, in Orlando, Florida. We have incorporated many of their suggestions in this version.

Fred Genesee, Margo Gottlieb, Anne Katz, and *Meg Malone*

Introduction

Overview of Assessment

Managing the Assessment Process provides a window into the complexities of assessment and suggests some ways to think about assessing ESOL students.[1] Its primary audience is teachers who provide direct services to ESOL students in a variety of pre-K–12 settings, including ESL teachers, bilingual teachers, content area teachers, and teachers of students with special needs and talents.[2] However, all stakeholders in the assessment process, including students, parents, principals, district and state administrators, as well as national policy makers, will find this document helpful for defining their roles in the assessment process.

This document offers a general description of assessment and some considerations in the assessment of ESOL students. Exhibit 1 illustrates the linkage among instruction, assessment, and *ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students* within the context of teaching and learning. The ESL standards should serve as the foundation for planning lessons, designing tasks, or selecting or developing assessments that further student learning.

[1] *ESOL* stands for "English to speakers of other languages." The term refers to learners who are in the process of acquiring English as an additional language.

[2] Because we have defined the primary audience as teachers, much of the text uses the terms *teachers* or *educators* when describing how to apply the assessment process. However, we recognize that other audiences may be involved in instituting this process as well.

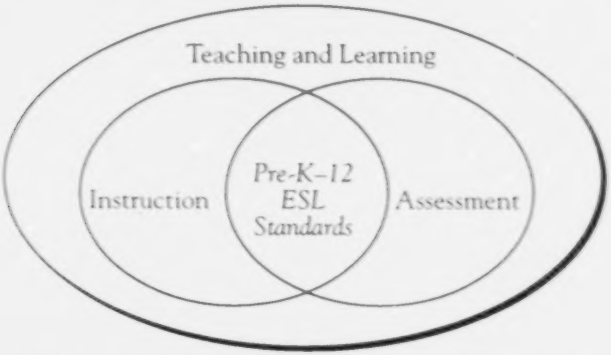

Exhibit 1: The Context for Instruction and Assessment for ESOL Students

Key Terms

Exhibit 2 shows the relationship among key terms used when measuring student learning. As the diagram illustrates, a *test* is narrow in focus, designed to measure a set of skills or behaviors at one point in time. *Assessment* is broader in scope and involves gathering information over a period of time. This information might include formal tests, classroom observations, student self-assessments, or data from other sources. *Evaluation* applies assessment data that have been scored and analyzed to make judgments or draw inferences about students and educational programs.

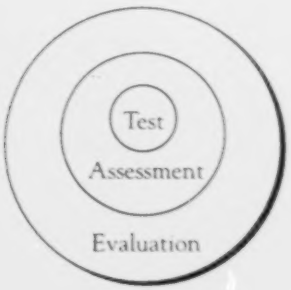

Exhibit 2: Distinction Among Testing, Assessment, and Evaluation

Classroom assessments are those that are interwoven into instruction, often created and delivered by ESL/bilingual teachers. *Large-scale assessments* are those planned and conducted at the district, state, or national levels. These assessments are often considered high stakes because they can result in consequences for students, teachers, or schools. For example, in some states, high school graduation depends on passing a large-scale assessment. The framework for large-scale assessment should include ESOL students and special needs students, thus reducing the need for accommodations and modifications once the assessment has been adopted. The principles and discussions throughout this document refer to both large-scale and classroom assessment, unless specified otherwise.

Additional terms to describe assessments and the assessment process include *fairness*, *reliability*, *validity*, and *usefulness*. These terms are defined below and always used with these technical definitions.

Fairness refers to the assessment's equity throughout the assessment process. Fairness implies equal access to and opportunities for learning for all students, particularly with regard to students' diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. For example, in planning assessments, fairness should be reflected in the selection of the ESL standards and their alignment with the purposes for assessment. When collecting information, identifying background information about students and looking at the purposes of programmatic assessment are important in establishing fairness. When analyzing and interpreting information, the information collected must be put into context with regard to the second language population. Finally, when reporting the results, all contextual features, including the diverse backgrounds of students, parents, and other stakeholders, must be considered before deciding how to share information. When fairness is violated, bias results. Bias is a major issue for all diverse populations and can invalidate the results of the assessment.

Reliability is an assessment's ability to produce consistent results. In other words, an assessment should yield the same results, or scores, from the same student. Many factors can jeopardize reliability, such as the instrument used to assess students or the way the assessment is scored. For

example, some assessments may have problems with the individual tasks a student is asked to perform. If a student performs significantly differently on the same task within a short period of time, it is most likely a problem of the instrument and not the student. Raters who score an assessment may also cause reliability problems. Two raters using the same scoring system should give the same student the same score. If one rater has been trained differently from another, or is using the criteria inconsistently, then a student may get different scores by different raters on the same task. Such threats to reliability are not the fault of the instrument, but of the raters.

Validity refers to the assessment's match between the information collected and its specified purpose(s). For example, an oral proficiency assessment that relies on students writing an essay would not be a valid assessment instrument. In addition, a standardized measure that has been designed and normed on native-English-speaking students is not a valid tool for ESOL students. Validity is also dependent on reliability. If an instrument is not reliable, it cannot be valid. Validity is the responsibility of both test developer and test user.

Finally, an assessment's *usefulness* is crucial. Usefulness is an assessment's ability to meet the needs of its users while providing the maximum amount of reliability and validity. Usefulness includes the cost, both for money and for time, and management in the use or administration of the assessment.

Organization of the Document

This document is divided into four sections. The first section provides a conceptual model for assessment, including a description of the different phases of the assessment process and basic principles that need to be considered when assessing ESOL students. The second section shows the purposes of assessment and stakeholders' involvement in the process. The third section describes and distinguishes among different approaches to assessment. The last section discusses some general uses for assessment data.

A Conceptual Model for Assessment

Teachers, administrators, and policy makers make numerous decisions every day that have an impact on the education of ESOL students. For example, teachers make decisions about the appropriateness of instructional plans for individual students with special needs or talents; administrators make decisions about the eligibility and placement of new students; and policy makers make decisions about the adoption and implementation of new programs. Assessment supports the process of making these kinds of decisions. It provides the information necessary to guide educators in determining students' progress in attaining the language competencies specified in *ESL Standards*. The assessment process includes planning, collecting and recording, analyzing and interpreting, and using relevant information for decision making and reporting. Exhibit 3 illustrates this dynamic and cyclical process.

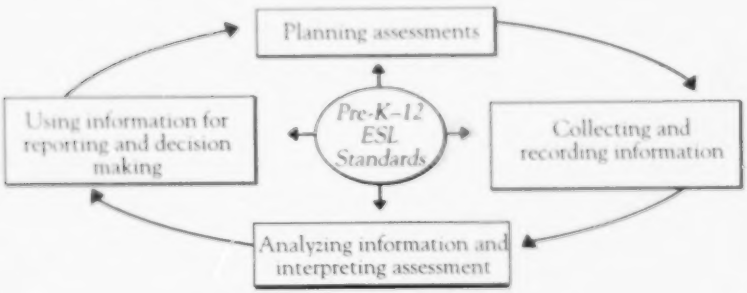
Planning assessments
Using information for reporting and decision making
Pre-K–12 ESL Standards
Collecting and recording information
Analyzing information and interpreting assessment

Exhibit 3: The Assessment Process

As illustrated, assessment is a purposeful, multiphased, systematic, and ongoing process. When ESOL students are represented in the pre-K–12 student population, several factors must be considered in assessment design. First, linguistic and cultural characteristics need to be taken into account when formulating the assessment plan. The assessment design should also build on the developmental nature of language acquisition for all students, acknowledging as well the additional demands facing ESOL learners. This developmental perspective, illustrated in Exhibit 4, underlies any assessment process that claims to measure student learning over time.

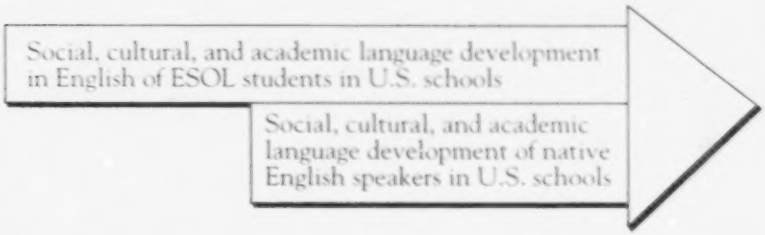
Social, cultural, and academic language development in English of ESOL students in U.S. schools
Social, cultural, and academic language development of native English speakers in U.S. schools

Exhibit 4: Continua of Language Development of Pre-K–12 Students

In the following section, principles highlighting the role of linguistic and cultural diversity are embedded within the different phases of the assessment process. These principles support educators in making equitable decisions for ESOL students.

Principles of Assessment

Planning Assessments

Planning is perhaps the most crucial part of the assessment process because it clarifies purposes, defines stakeholders, identifies assessment approaches, and establishes a management plan. This phase, if centered on the needs of ESOL students, will lead to the creation of a well-grounded assessment plan.

In addition to information about students' language and content area development, demographic or background information about students can also inform educational decision making for both instruction and assessment. Educators need to understand their students better and monitor the effectiveness of their educational efforts so that they can plan standards-based instruction. In doing so, they should consider their students' learning strategies and preferred learning styles, their attitudes and interests, their study habits and engagement in instructional activities, their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, their previous educational experiences (especially literacy ones), and their medical history.

The first eight principles reveal the careful planning needed to ensure equitable assessment practices.

1. The students' ages, learning styles, levels of proficiency and academic achievement in first and second languages, educational continuity inside and outside the United States, and amount of time receiving ESL/bilingual support provide the background information for assessment.

2. Assessments draw on the social, cultural, and academic experiences of ESOL learners.

3. Assessments are based on current educational research, especially in the areas of first and second language acquisition.

4. Assessments allow ESOL students to demonstrate complex learning in contextualized ways, such as through the use of real objects or graphics (pictures, charts, tables, diagrams, photographs, and graphic organizers).

5. Classroom assessments mirror the language(s) and content of instruction and instructional practices.

6. Classroom assessments enable students to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways from multiple perspectives, thus serving as learning experiences themselves.

7. Classroom assessments, such as thematic projects, promote student involvement and reflection on learning and require students to use a variety of learning strategies and resources.

8. Assessment documents or rubrics represent the full range of student performance and are designed with a set of clearly defined criteria against which the standards are measured.

Collecting and Recording Information

Collecting data in a systematic, careful way provides the most consistent information about students and their progress in attaining the ESL standards. In implementing assessment plans, educators need to rely on a management system to coordinate the collection and recording of information. This management plan will make assessment more feasible at all levels of implementation (classroom, program, school, district, state, and national). Prior to gathering information, teachers should consider how they will use and analyze data. Consistency also needs to be maintained in recording assessment information. The next four principles provide guidance on collection and record keeping.

9. Multiple types of assessment, including both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced measures, are used to form a composite picture of ESOL student performance over time.

10. Information from classroom assessment for monitoring student progress is gathered within the instructional cycle (i.e., lesson, theme, project, unit).

11. Assessments use multiple sources of information, including teachers, parents and students themselves, to provide a clear picture of student performance.

12. Assessment data are collected and recorded systematically with a uniform set of procedures and guidelines for administration.

Analyzing and Interpreting Assessment Information

Analyzing and interpreting assessment information is the phase in which the information collected and recorded is examined according to the purposes established in the assessment plan. For example, if portfolio entries have been collected, the portfolio as a whole should be analyzed according to a scale or set of criteria. Some analyses may show that a student has reached a certain level of language proficiency or can perform tasks in class similar to ESOL or native-English-speaking peers. Analyses can also reflect the extent to which specific standards have been met. The next three principles address issues of analyzing assessment information.

13. Data are analyzed and interpreted in light of the unique characteristics that define ESOL students, such as those suggested in Principle 1.

14. Teachers need to be able to pair specified criteria or descriptors with samples of ESOL student work to gain a sense of the range of student performance.

15. English language assessments for ESOL students at the upper end of the proficiency continuum should be linked to the average performance of native-English-speaking peers to facilitate educational continuity and success.

Using Information for Reporting and Decision Making

This final phase of the assessment process continues the collaboration of teachers with other stakeholders. For example, an individual student's portfolio may be shared with the parents, whereas a composite class or school portfolio may be shared with school and district officials. Such results allow stakeholders to make informed decisions, based on their original purposes for assessment, on issues such as student reclassification or program improvement. These final four principles relate to reporting and decision making.

16. Results from assessments are used to enhance instruction, improve student performance, and aid in educational decision making.

17. Results from assessments are understandable and useful to students and the greater educational community. Information is presented clearly and in the appropriate language(s).

18. Results from assessments are reported to stakeholders with reference to ESOL student performance of designated standards.

19. Results are reported in a timely fashion to stakeholders (i.e., while information is still current and applicable), and all relevant information is compiled and considered before a decision is rendered.

These 19 principles should form the basis for a comprehensive professional development program in assessment for all teachers. A coordinated effort among teachers is necessary to have continuity of student data from year to year. When all teachers are vested in instruction and assessment practice, students will benefit.

Purposes of Assessment and Stakeholders' Involvement

Different members of the pre-K–12 educational community will assess attainment of ESL standards for different purposes. Exhibit 5 (see page 12) illustrates the range of stakeholders and purposes for collecting such assessment information. At the classroom level, for example, teachers might collect assessment information to determine whether students have mastered new material, using students' performances on classroom tasks as a guide for lesson planning. At the program level, coordinators may use the results of individual student assessment to place students in appropriate instructional settings.

Given the range of stakeholders and purposes, educators rely on a variety of assessment approaches to make informed decisions. Such decisions should result from collaboration among educators, such as principals, coordinators, and teachers working together to determine and implement student assessment practices. Approaches appropriate to one set of stakeholders and purposes, however, may not provide useful information in other educational settings. Every educator must judge the suitability of particular methods relative to specific purposes, students, settings, and audiences at different times during the course of instruction. Thus, it is important for all educators to understand the relative utility of multiple ways to collect and record information for assessing the attainment of the ESL standards.

Level of Implementation	Stakeholders	Purposes
Classroom	• students • parents • teachers	• allow students to assess their own progress • monitor students' progress toward attainment of ESL standards • provide ongoing diagnostic information • create partnerships which foster communication among parents, students, and teachers • plan and improve instruction
Program	• teachers • coordinators/directors • principals • counselors	• screen, place, and transition students in program • monitor the program's progress toward student attainment of ESL standards • document student learning • improve program effectiveness
School/District	• principals • assistant superintendents • superintendents • parent advisory committees	• ascertain the extent to which standards have been met • guide professional development of teachers • determine effectiveness of teaching and learning • review policy based on assessment/evaluation information
State	• superintendents • state Boards of Education • business community • legislatures	• be accountable for student learning based on attainment of standards • report summary information • create linkages with schools/districts • act upon summary information and trend data
National	• Office of Civil Rights • U.S. Department of Education • Congress	• ensure equitable educational opportunities • enforce court decisions regarding ESOL students

Exhibit 5: Stakeholders and Purposes for Assessment at Each Level of Implementation*

*Adapted from Gottlieb, M. (1997). A peek into portfolio practices. In A. Huhta, V. Kohonen, L. Kurki-Suonio, & S. Luoma (Eds.), *Current developments and alternatives in language assessment: Proceedings of LTRC 96* (pp. 23–36). Jyvaskyla, Finland: University of Jyvaskyla.

Approaches to Assessment

In this section, different approaches to assessment are discussed, along with some ways to record the results of these assessments. Some approaches include performance-based assessments, proficiency-based assessments, and commercially developed, nationally norm-referenced tests. There are many ways to collect and record information, including anecdotal records, checklists, rating scales, journals, and portfolios. No single approach to assessment or method of record keeping is satisfactory for all purposes and stakeholders. Instead, using multiple approaches and record-keeping methods can help demonstrate and document student progress thoroughly and accurately. Although assessment can occur in many settings, a great deal of it occurs in the ESL/bilingual classroom. Other settings, such as content area classrooms, the lunchroom and school yard, as well as the home, can be excellent sources for information on students.

In deciding which assessment(s) to use in an instructional program, it is helpful to choose the type or types of assessment necessary for the instructional setting and purpose. There are several different ways to distinguish among types of assessment: criterion-referenced versus norm-referenced; proficiency versus achievement; and direct versus indirect. Exhibit 6 briefly outlines the differences among these types of assessment.

Criterion-referenced Compares student performances against a set of predefined criteria. In standards-based assessment, a type of criterion-referenced assessment, the standard serves as the criterion. Can be used in the classroom to measure student progress in learning an instructional objective, when the criteria are developed by teachers; throughout a school, when the criteria are school based; or on a statewide test, when the criteria are developed by the state.	**Norm-referenced** Provides information on how students perform with respect to their peers around the country. On these kinds of tests, students are ranked against each other. May be used to show how students have progressed relative to similar populations at different levels of implementation.
Language Proficiency Captures a student's holistic ability in a language, generally showing the extent to which a student has acquired a second language. It can be used to ascertain a student's global proficiency in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	**Academic Achievement** Measures a student's mastery of curricular material. The results of an achievement test could be used to measure a student's progress in relation to the instructional content.
Direct Performance Requires the student to show specified knowledge through demonstration. For example, a direct assessment of oral proficiency requires a student to speak.	**Indirect Performance** Relies on a less authentic means of capturing knowledge. For example, a vocabulary test does not directly assess reading, but it does assess a component of reading. In addition, may be descriptive of the way in which the data is used such as relying on a written transcript for oral language.

Exhibit 6: Different Types of Assessment

In addition to assessment results collected in ESL/bilingual classrooms, educational decision making calls for many different kinds of information about students. Content area teachers can collaborate with ESL or bilingual teachers to discuss student progress; students can work on peer and self-assessment; and parents can share information with

teachers during parent/teacher conferences. In addition, this information can contribute to the creation and revision of special needs students' individualized education plans (IEPs). The results can inform the ESL/bilingual teacher of a student's ability to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

Exhibit 7 (see page 16) identifies some activities associated with the whole assessment process. When planning assessments, teachers need to define their purposes and audiences. In the case of performance assessments, the type of performance or task would be chosen, and the rating scale and criteria would be reviewed. In the case of a proficiency assessment, a preexisting assessment with valid, reliable criteria for rating would be selected. Finally, in considering a commercially developed, nationally norm-referenced test, its purpose, along with the test's appropriateness for a specific group of students, would be considered. To ensure the success of the assessment plan, teachers and others involved in assessment should receive the professional development and support needed for implementation throughout the assessment process.

The collection and recording of information relies on a variety of record-keeping methods. In addition to the relatively straightforward administration of a standardized test according to the designated directions, teachers can use student journals, observations, portfolios, conferences, and performance tasks. When students are engaged in an instructional activity or task that will be assessed, such as a science experiment, a social studies demonstration, or a storytelling, teachers need to have a clear set of criteria to score or interpret the student's performance. These criteria or descriptors are often defined in a form called a *rubric*. Together, the rubric and student performance constitute the assessment.

Rubrics usually take the form of holistic scales, checklists, rating scales, or matrices. At the classroom level, rubrics may be task or project specific; at a school, district, or state level, the criteria are more generalized and specifically aligned to standards. Classroom rubrics should be designed by the team of teachers who plan to use them; school or pro-

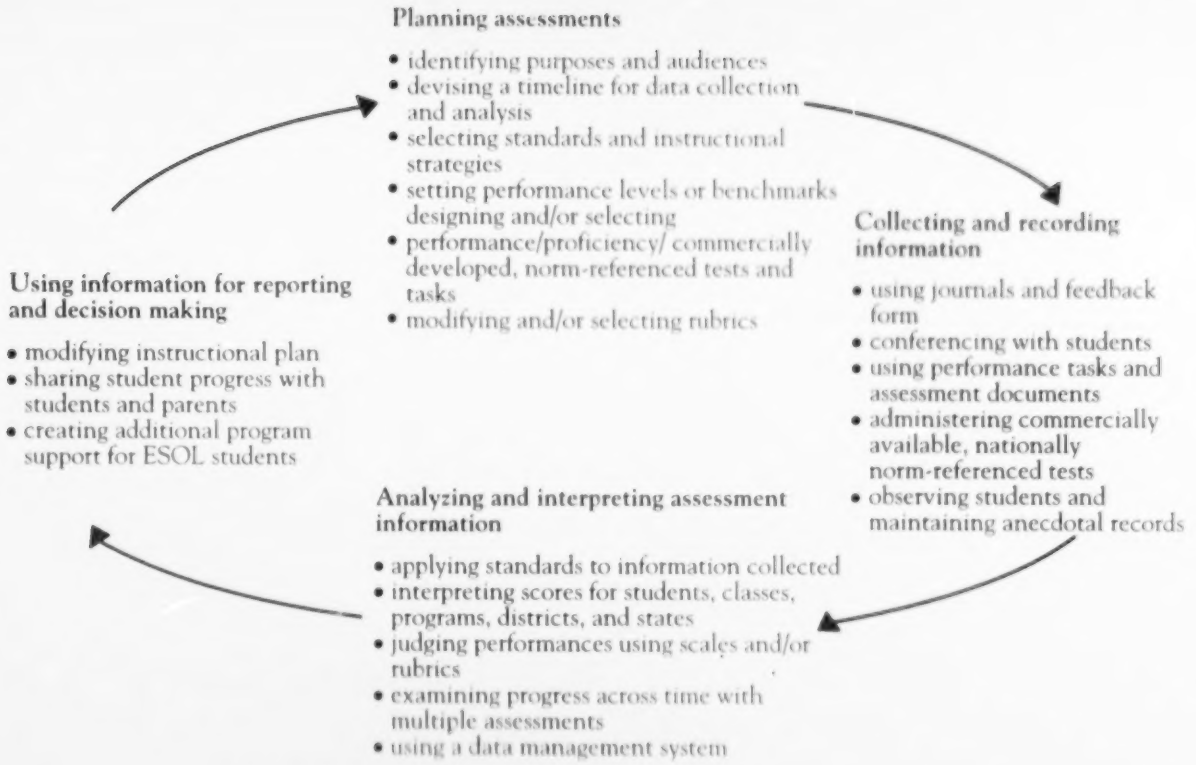
Planning assessments
• identifying purposes and audiences
• devising a timeline for data collection and analysis
• selecting standards and instructional strategies
• setting performance levels or benchmarks designing and/or selecting
• performance/proficiency/ commercially developed, norm-referenced tests and tasks
• modifying and/or selecting rubrics
Collecting and recording information
• using journals and feedback form
• conferencing with students
• using performance tasks and assessment documents
• administering commercially available, nationally norm-referenced tests
• observing students and maintaining anecdotal records
Analyzing and interpreting assessment information
• applying standards to information collected
• interpreting scores for students, classes, programs, districts, and states
• judging performances using scales and/or rubrics
• examining progress across time with multiple assessments
• using a data management system
Using information for reporting and decision making
• modifying instructional plan
• sharing student progress with students and parents
• creating additional program support for ESOL students

Exhibit 7: Activities Associated With Each Phase of the Assessment Process

gram rubrics should be selected and modified to serve in assessing the work of the specific group of students.

After designing a rubric, the rubric development team should design and implement a system for training their colleagues to use the rubric. It is important for teachers to develop a common way of applying the rubric to student work to maintain the reliability of the rubric. If rubrics are applied in different ways by different teachers, then the rubric is unreliable.

When the team of teachers develops a writing rubric, for example, they should work to base benchmarks on student writing samples to exemplify each level of the rubric. Then, the team can share the rubric and the benchmark samples with their colleagues. If several teachers rate the same student and arrive at the same result, then the rubric is considered reliable. It is not necessary for every student paper to be rated by several different teachers; however, it is important for at least two teachers to rate a common set of writing samples to demonstrate the rubric's reliability.

If a teacher gives a standardized test to the class, each student's score on the test is one piece of information. The teacher could also ask the students to reflect on the experience in their journals and discuss their reflections at a conference, adding two more data sources. In the case of a performance assessment, the teacher might use a checklist to determine the students' abilities to perform the task. The students might also reflect on this performance in their journals and include the teacher's checklist and the individual journal entries in their portfolios. Clearly, this is just one example of the many ways to use assessments to collect and record information.

After collecting and recording, the data must be analyzed and interpreted. At this time, a performance task must be interpreted using a rubric or scale. Samples of student work are selected to serve as illustrations of rubrics and criteria and to guide teachers in interpreting individual performances. For students who have taken commercially devel-

oped, norm-referenced tests, scores can be plotted to see patterns. In addition, results from all the assessments administered during a time period (e.g., a quarter, semester, or school year) can be examined for cumulative progress across time. Ongoing assessment creates much information about students that needs to be arranged in an organized fashion to maximize its usability. As access to technology increases, educators can use computer programs to store assessment information as well as to analyze some results.

Finally, the analyzed data are organized into reports and shared with stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. The shared data then form the basis for making decisions regarding ESOL students. The reports need to be arranged so that the underlying purpose for the assessment is clear to the designated audience. Often for ESOL students, data are disaggregated to reflect distinct smaller groups within the larger group, such as by proficiency level or by years of continuous education. Just as data may be displayed in different ways for different purposes, a range of reports may be prepared to suit a range of stakeholder audiences.

General Uses for Assessment Results

Assessment data can have several overarching uses; three such uses are discussed in this document. Assessment is useful for the creation of effective learning environments that promote nativelike levels of English language proficiency and appropriate grade-level academic achievement among ESOL students. Assessment results can assist teachers in modifying their instructional plans to better meet the needs of their students. Information gained from assessment can also help students identify their accomplishments and areas for further development. Assessment is an essential part of creating effective learning environments because it provides the information critical for the numerous day-to-day and high stakes decisions made about ESOL students and instruction for ESOL students.

Assessment is an important component of accountability for all educators and policy makers who work with or are involved in the education of ESOL students. Assessment results can assist teachers, school administrators, district personnel, and policy makers to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of their educational policies and programs for ESOL students. The results of properly designed assessments can guide educational professionals who work in ESL classrooms, the whole school, or the district to create effective learning environments for ESOL students by: (a) extending their understanding of ESOL students and their learning needs; (b) identifying educational policies, plans, and practices that are successful with ESOL students; and (c) demonstrating whether

ESOL students have been given full access to challenging instruction and a full and appropriate range of educational opportunities, including experiences with new technologies and pedagogies.

If the results of ESL assessment are shared openly and regularly with ESOL students and others, then these assessments can facilitate partnerships and linkages with students, parents, communities, and schools. Effective education for ESOL students requires that ESOL students and their parents are equal partners with fully proficient English-speaking students, parents, and teachers in managing schools.

Conclusion

Although some have declared that general principles of good educational practice can serve all students, including linguistically and culturally diverse students, this document describes specific principles that will lead to equitable educational practice, specifically in assessment, for ESOL students. It also underscores the important linkages between instruction and assessment and stakeholders involved in the process.

Assessment is an essential component of effective education practices because it can indicate students' social, cultural, and academic accomplishments as well as their needs. Assessment provides information necessary for educators to make sound educational decisions. Assessment grows out of a recognition of the educational context; it is tied to the needs and characteristics of students being assessed, to the competencies of the teachers administering the assessments, and to the accountability demands of the larger institutional contexts within which students and teachers operate. Most important, assessment must be equitable; it must take into account both the ways in which assessment tools are designed and the ways in which they are used. As the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy (1977) notes, assessments must change "from a gatekeeper to a gateway" (p. 1).

References and Related Documents

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